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General Synod Reflections from Synod Attendees

■ A Young Adult Delegate

I never truly understood what it means to be part of the United Church of Christ until I attended my first General Synod. General Synod changed everything I thought about what a church should be like and solidified a lot of my personal beliefs. Although sitting through plenary meetings was not the most exciting thing it helped me to learn a lot about the issues our denomination, as a whole, is experiencing and what we are doing to address them. I had heard about the UCC being open and affirming but I had never truly understood what it meant because I go to one of the more conservative churches in the UCC. It was refreshing to be able to interact with people of a multitude of sexual orientations without any of the stigmas I experience at home. I previously believed that one had to go to another kind of church to experience the amount of energy during worship that I experienced at Synod. However I now realize that there is UCC church for any and every one to go to and be accepted for who they are as an individual. I know that the UCC is a multitude of people with the same religious foundation but also a wide range of beliefs, opinions, and views. For me Synod represents how I would like the world to be, unified and in order to better not only yourself but everyone around you. I will never forget the people I met or the



experiences I had at General Synod 28 and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to represent the Southeast Conference of the UCC. General Synod 28 has ignited a passion for me to be more involved in our denomination, that I hopefully will be able cultivate in the near future. I will always be comforted knowing no matter where I am or who I am, or who I become the UCC will accept me for me and have a seat open for me at the table, which is more than I could ever ask for from anyone. Knowing that a large number of people like those in the UCC have restored my hope in what the world could and should be. Thank you UCC for what you are and what you do.

Sincerely, Wesley Farrell-Williams, member of First Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA

■ A First Time Delegate

Wonderful. Uplifting. Spiritual. Renewing.

UCC News

UCC Newsroom

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

UCC contingent among 5,000 rallying to 'Save Our Schools'

Janice Resseger calls public schools "the primary civic institution in every community in this country." But she fears that Americans have "forgotten why justice in public education matters."



Those are just some of the words I could use to describe what a General Synod of the UCC is like. All apply, yet don't capture everything.

More than anything, I think the people you meet and talk with and exchange ideas with is the strongest part of Synod. The crackling energy that comes out of these experiences spills over into everything else: worship, committee meetings, deliberations, meals, fun times and the deeper spiritual contemplation and growth that results.

Each and every time I have come home from a Synod I have been a different person, more deeply developed, a bit more in touch with our Lord and even more appreciative of what the United Church of Christ is doing in the wider world. This truly is a welcoming church, even with disagreements, financial concerns, unruliness in Synod deliberations at times and things that don't quite go right.



But the people! That just may be the true secret of what makes the UCC work, and Synod is just a compressed view of the wider UCC. When you have 900 delegates and over 3,000 people gathered in one place to do church work, whether it be business, worship or witnessing, it's like a Volkswagen being turned into a hot rod: never the same. You come home from it supercharged and fired up. And you are never the same.

I can think of some specific people who inspired me and opened me to new ideas while I was in Tampa, Fla. The night my wife Lois and I arrived, we encountered a UCC member from Hawaii, a Mr. Steve Ito. I had never met anyone from Hawaii, so it was completely a foreign experience. He related his own times with the UCC from a Pacific Islander perspective, and it certainly once again gave rise to a wider view. He was often seen around the convention center leading his wife, who is a social worker in Hawaii who happens to be blind. His care of and for her was visible and infinitely compassionate, and a shining example of Christianity.

My first meeting with a Muslim was a shock of a good nature. My assigned committee was looking at the resolution about hostility toward Islam and the Muslim community. This gentleman, Mr. Mohammed Sammak, witnessed to us about the Muslim world and was dignified, gracious and eloquent. Whenever I encountered him in the next few days, he remembered me, and would always stop to talk. When I asked for his permission to use his name so he would not get in trouble with his government back home in Lebanon, he smiled and swiftly gave that permission. My life is immeasurably enriched for making his acquaintance.

While sitting at a snack bar in the convention center, Lois and I encountered a young man from California named Peter (ironic, that!) who turned out to be a native of Puerto Rico. He had left his country when he saw firsthand the intolerance toward LGBT people. And he was sad about that country's conference leaving the UCC after the marriage equality measure that passed at General Synod 25 in Atlanta. We spent a pleasurable hour chatting with him and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

During one of the times I was involved in committee work, Lois met a UCC missionary who was home on leave from Hungary. They spent quite a while talking together at the waterside of the convention center, watching the rays swim by and then the dolphins. She learned from him, and he from her. And I did so too, although indirectly.

Those are just the people I didn't previously know.

And then there were the folks I worked with in committee hearings and folks from our own conference. The committee work almost went into "wordsmith meltdown" as one delegate described it, we were so intent on inserting inclusive language. But it was instructive and eventually became very satisfying and a bit fun.

And every time I am around them, I am continually astounded by the members of our own conference. Dedicated and upstanding, gracious and funny, and just plain hilarious at times – that's the Southeast Conference! And we all help each other. What more could you ask for?

I could probably fill a book with the experiences I bring home from each General Synod, this being my third straight but first as a delegate. Each time is different, but each time enables growth as a Christian and as a person. That to me is the real strength of our times together at Synod.

Jennifer Spears, member of Garden of Grace UCC in Columbia, S.C.

■ An Experienced Attendee

From Leonard Pitts' challenges,

to Elizabeth Clements' final words, so inspiring;

With dancing youth, singing
praise;

Five hundred marching for
Justice

to nearby Publix Store,
one cent more for farm
workers;

Workshops on Justice,

as God's creation,
how can we not care for
others?



On Stewardship,

engaging in caring for the Earth,
greening local churches.

Summing up by President Dr. Geoffrey Black

UCC Values: Continuing Testament;

Extravagant Welcome;
Changing Lives;

Audacious inclusion,

advocacy, concern for the least powerful;

Strong support for LGBT persons,

Large number of Peace and Justice churches.

General Synod connects us,

to leaders, other churches, old friends.

I came home grateful

to be part of the United Church of Christ.
Mary Ellen Myers, member Central Congregational UCC Atlanta

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S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3

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